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Gustav Frenssen—A Study.

(Für die Pädagogischen Monatshefte.)

Von Dr. Warren W. Florer, University of Michigan.

(Concluded.)

Only the most important stages of Jörn Uhl's slow and powerful religious development may be given in this article.

When but a mere babe Jörn Uhl was robbed of a mother by the carelessness of a father, whose inner life had been corroded by cards and drink. Jörn had no guide to explain to him the phenomena he saw about him. That it was so, was perhaps well, for he was compelled to look out for himself. As he grew up, he observed the lives of his brothers and father and witnessed the increasing ruin of 'Die Uhl.' This in small way he endeavored to correct and to prevent as much as possible. He learned in early boyhood that the best thing in the world is work, the worst, idleness with gambling, drink and certain forms of society as companions. (In this connection Frenssen is unscathing in his attacks upon the gambling and drinking of men and the excessive society of women, by which children are shorn not only of their birthright, but also of their parent-, especially mother-right.) Jörn was thus inwardly prepared to hear the history of his family, but when the teacher noticed the rebellious instinct when he came to tell about Jörn's father, he simply gave the following advice: "What you have inherited from your fathers, acquire it in order to possess it."

Jörn then determined to prepare himself to be Landvogt; this was also the wish of his father. To attain this end he was sent to the Gymnasium. But Jörn, who was prepared only in English, encountered Latin, which has about the same relative position in the curriculum as mathe-

matics in American schools. He therefore was compelled to begin in the lowest class. The course of instruction offered nothing new to him. He finally determined to follow Thiess Thiessen's advice—"gerade auf den Landvogt los!"

The instruction in the confirmation class, in which the old church dogma was proclaimed, was also incomprehensible to him and therefore torturous. The practical, sober youth, who applied everything to 'Die Uhl' and to the people who dwelt there and to the conditions of the village, could not understand either the sin or the grace that was taught. The sin seemed to him to come much too late and the grace much too soon. The sin began with larceny, theft and murder (not with cards, drink, excessive society and gossip). The grace was there too soon, namely, when one cast his sin upon the Lord. Jörn Uhl could not understand 'diesen lieben Gott.' To him God seemed to be an impracticable bookkeeper, who in his room kept his books in the most beautiful order and on the outside was being frightfully deceived by his chosen people.

Jörn Uhl went out to the open field and listened to old Wilhelm Dreyer, as no one ever listened in the church. Dreyer's experience was for him in those years evangel; to work and be sober and saving—glad tidings of great joy.

Then came the time of life when one has no guide, when the parents lose control, if they have any. And the other people do not grab for the reins which are dragging behind us, when we are rushing madly down the street—which leads to the marketplace of life, to that place where destiny so earnestly asks us:—"What are you worth?" The meaning of these hours is so important because they denote the transition from youth to manhood with all its conflicts and experiences. Jörn Uhl was no exception. He had his experience with the Sanddeern and at the Jungeleuteball, where under the influence of the experience with the Sanddeern and the resulting conflicts he attempted to outdo his father and brothers in their wild life. But he did not possess the talent to become a vagabond. Then followed a sad night and the morrow, when he struggled with his conscience which was bidding fair to make a coward of him. Until this time he had nothing which he could honor. No one had understood how to bring religion close to him. The vigorous, beautiful and proud stature of the Savior they had botched and destroyed. He did not have a mother. Thus this warmhearted youth was without love. It was natural that he went again to the Sanddeern who was pure, although wronged by the gossip of the neighborhood, and who, after hearing his confessions, revealed unto him a new gospel and went her way. The content of her gospel was: 'What one has experienced is not necessarily destructive, rather productive of strength, if one does not give up the battle for the good and the true.'

The experiences of these days worked upon him for years. He was

without friends and books. In his introspective mood he determined to separate himself from women and from the world. One cannot, however, get away from the world very easily. If one turns around, it is there; if one turns around again, it is still there; if one closes his eyes, one hears its bustling; stops his ears, it capers before him. One must take a stand, keep peace or begin conflict. Jörn Uhl began conflict. In this conflict he drew the eyebrows so deep that he did not perceive the great wonders, and he carried his head so high that he did not heed the great beauties. Therefore, if the world with all its natural and human equipment did not meet his approval, so must he who created heaven and earth fare ill.

Jörn, indeed, went to church. He had been going to church for months, because he noticed that the saving and the sober and the old-fashioned people went to church; he also noticed that the young and the wild and the statemakers did not go to church. Jörn went to church because he desired to be and remain a safe man. He wanted to show it, so he went to church. He went to church and it bored him. Above all things he could not reconcile the fact that the man who preached to him was a hypocrite, judging from his outside actions. The old man Dreyer said: "It does not depend on the life of the man, Jörn, but upon whether he preaches the right word of God." But just this right doctrine which the preacher proclaimed cut Jörn to the very quick. The contents of the sermons were about as follows: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." "The Trinity praised in eternity." "Whoever builds upon his life and upon his works will be eternally damned." "Believe and ye will be saved." Jörn Uhl sat and listened and could not discover what these teachings had to do with the wild life in the village and with his own life. He wondered why the word of God was so impractical, and thought out his own Bible.

At times when the small man read the prescribed passages with a singing, sepulchral voice it seemed as if he heard something else than what the man afterwards really preached. It seemed to him as if he heard great powerful thoughts right out of human life. He was like unto a man who, lying in the edge of the woods, is surrounded by the twittering of birds and the buzzing of insects and hears deep in the forest a spring rushing with full, heavy and pure water. But in the dependency of his youth it never occurred to him to read through Matthew or Marc to see whether the man had not suppressed a good part of the evangel, and falsified another. But Jörn still went to church, and was becoming as the others, when an episode, the rescuing of a child, occurred.

On the next Sabbath, the little one whom he had rescued accompanied him on the way to church. Jörn Uhl went in and listened to a sermon on faith, and how the so-called good works and the so-called upright life were to be looked upon with suspicion, as "Glänzendes Laster." After

church the old tailor Rose followed him and began to talk about religion. Jörn was at first surprised to hear a common man talk about religion, as that was the business of the minister in the pulpit. The old man insisted that one should always act with the help of God. Jörn Uhl could not understand that. He then went to Wieten Penn, the faithful old servant, and heard her interpretation. Jörn had thus three different interpretations of religion. The one which was preached in the church no sensible man could sanction. The tailor's—to care for others in the name of God—and Wieten's, to care for yourself in your own name—both had sense. Reflecting over these problems, he began to become an independent man.

Then followed years of experience, study, war, the reconstruction period, the accident to his father, the story of Wieten Penn. And when Jörn was thinking about the diagnosis of the physician there came upon him for the first time the feeling of the limitations of human power, the strong feeling of helplessness, the feeling, 'whither my soul in thy awful loneliness and desertion.' And it was well that he had heard the Lord's prayer when at school, otherwise he might have feared too much the superhuman phantoms which stood in hostile array about him. Yes, he might have worshipped them! He then fled with trembling confidence to the invisible, strong, blessing powers which are in the evangel. This was an important step that Jörn Uhl made, who had previously been so certain. For he began to investigate and question, wonder and respect. The portals to a complete wide human existence were opened to him. He began to see the wonders and heed the great beauties about him, for he realized that he was not all-knowing.

Then followed work, nearer acquaintanceship with Lena Tarn, marriage, a happy year, the birth of a boy, fever, death of Lena Tarn, return of his brothers—reaction. Jörn Uhl's character began to break down, and he was inclined to the dark and the hard. We see again the influence of Wieten Penn in the home. She again relates the old stories and reads out of the Old Testament, because she sought in accord with her experience the secret of life not in the sunshine, but in the dark, and therefore she could not enter the spirit of the New Testament. Jörn Uhl continued to live his life full of work and sorrow, unconsciously cheered by the little one. Lisbeth Junker, the comrade of his youth, came from time to time to 'Die Uhl,' to look after his child, as she said.

One day this child led the new pastor into the house. The old pastor, the one had preached so loud and certain about the right faith, had been called to a larger city. The new one was young, from his nature a child, and spoke his opinion about everything. And everything he said was true, but not always pleasant. He was not adapted to the 'Uhlen.' He was not adapted to these hardshelled, clever and cautious men, with

whom one must diligently seek the truth concealed behind the words. In the course of the year the opposition increased. Finally the entire congregation cried out. It wanted another, it wanted a safer man, a bombastic one, a smooth oily individual, and at the same time a good card player.

The new pastor, however, hoped through love and work to win all for himself and thereby for the proud, beautiful evangel. He came to invite Jörn to attend the services to be held in the honor of the fallen heroes. A tablet was to be placed in the church. On this tablet were the names of the men and under these: "They died for their country." This inscription pleased Jörn Uhl, but the parish wanted a more dignified phrase. In this connection he said: "Every earnest man does what these men have done." He then recalled in simple words the past, and spoke of the simple life of Lena Tarn. He said in conclusion: "Serving others, self-sacrificing, helping and remaining faithful, or whatever one may call it, is the real human kingdom. That is also the real Christianity.

Jörn, who could understand this conception of Christianity, looked at the pastor as if he longed to hear more. The pastor continued:

"The Savior has, through his beautiful, pure life and his wonderfully affecting death, and through his good, powerful and proud words, brought a fulness of thought and life into humanity, as a brilliant fire, as he said. Now the one takes this and the other that. The one church this and the other that, and betakes itself into a corner with its little fire-brand and lets it smoke or flame, according as it prefers smoke or flame, and says that is the truth of the Savior. Many add their own wisdom, many their dishonesty, and many indeed their malicious intent. Thus the Savior's real image has become with some petrified, with some masked, and with some so distorted that one no longer sees anything of his noble countenance. And it really is not so very difficult, even for a layman, to deduct from the first evangel a portrait so clear and distinct, that one recognizes the fundamental traits of his being, will and life. As far as I can see this is what he has to say to us: 'We shall have confidence that God always stands at our side, at all times, yea, even in the darkest moments, with a strong ever watchful will and with an ever good intent. Resting on this happy faith we shall war courageously against the evil within and about us. Fortified by confidence in God as by a high strong wall, we shall fight for the good and never doubt a final victory, first on this side and then on the other side. That I think is the entire Christianity.'" "If however," he continued, "one can not obtain this confidence in God, for that is not everyone's privilege, and can fulfill the good and the charitable without confidence in God, then one shall let that suffice and be happy."

"Every good man must immediately agree with that," Jörn Uhl ans-

were. "One does need to ponder over a thing for which one has no time. Also it is not necessary to render immature the understanding which God has given one, and then accept everything they charitably offer, or be eternally damned."

The pastor laughed right out. "Nothing is more certain," he said, "than that the religion Jesus wished to bring unto man was a very simple, original and clear one."

Such is a mere outline of the religion which Frenssen has given to his larger parish in "Jörn Uhl." He is simply helping to pave the way for the broader conception, for which all modern men have been working. The creed of this is work; the motive power individuality; the commandments are, love, hope and charity. The rock upon which this religion may securely rest is confidence in God.

The pastor went to the village to bring his thoughts and deeds unto the hardshelled people, and to attain as much, perhaps, as a dog attains barking at a passing lumber wagon. Jörn Uhl went to the darkest hour of his life, but with this new conception of the religion of the Savior ringing in his ears. It is impossible to give even a general review of Jörn Uhl's new development and of his corresponding influence at home, on his associates and on his country. One must read the book in order to appreciate the genius of this village Pastor.

We can not, unless it be the history of the young pastor's struggles, divine what this noble, intelligent Pastor will next produce. This Pastor who knows life and knows the needs of his hearers, who is thoroughly imbued with the sublime worth of those sacred writings which reveal the destiny and contemplations of men, and who also knows the best secular literature.* He understands it because he has experienced and observed it, appreciating that all poetry comes from the need and lot of men and women. He is a real man, humble before his divinity and proud before man. What he writes elevates, makes one more earnest against every sin, and more courageous against every destiny.

*Hermann und Dorothea. Rehtwisch's pamphlet entitled "Gustav Frenssen, der Dichter des 'Jörn Uhl,'" has been freely used. The passages from Frenssen's writings are adapted. April, 1903.

Zur gesetzgebenden Grammatik.

(Für die Pädagogischen Monatshefte.)

Von Dr. Edwin C. Reeder, Assistant Professor of German Philology, University of Wisconsin.

(Fortsetzung.)

Mit vielen Büchern geht es uns wie mit Menschen; wir werden den ersten Eindruck nicht los. Und der erste Eindruck, den ich von den „Sprachdummheiten“ erhielt, war der einer gelungenen Bierzeitung. Als